

Military Order



of the

Loyal Legion

of the



United States.



COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.



WAR PAPER 87.

The Capture of Fort Henry and Fort
Donaldson, February, 1862.



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The Capture of Fort Henry and Fort Donaldson, February, 1862.

BY

Companion

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The Capture of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, February, 1862.

Following the outbreak of the War of the Rebellion in April, 1861, to the opening of the year 1862, the engagements had by the Union troops with the enemy were generally negative in results. Bull Run had well served to show how unprepared the government was for war, and Wilson's Creek, in August, where the brave Lyon fell, was at best a drawn battle, for, while the Union forces held the field, they soon fell back a hundred miles to Rolla. In October the lamented Colonel Baker lost his life in what has been called "a disaster" at Balls Bluff, and at Belmont, in November, while General Grant proved a resourceful commander, the result was again a retreat from an advanced position. In the autumn and fall the three-months men were returning to their homes and the troops replacing them, poorly supplied, suffered much from the exposure and hardships of the fall and winter campaigns, and in consequence of the conditions stated there was in the North a pronounced feeling of anxiety in relation to the outlook for the future of the Union. The loyal people were greatly despondent over the existing conditions.

This feeling was intensified in the late fall and winter by what is known as the incident of "The Trent Affair." This was the capture of the Confederate commissioners, Mason and Slidell, on November 8, 1861, from the deck of a British mail steamer in the Bahamas, by a vessel of the United States Navy. These envoys were en route to England and France to seek the intervention of those countries in the cause of the South, and the grave diplomatic questions which arose out of the action greatly

increased the anxiety. The wise and prompt action of President Lincoln in directing the release and surrender of the captured commissioners alone abated the tense feeling, and, while his course was questioned by some at the time, later it was generally and fully concurred in by the loyal friends of the Union cause. Writing of General Grant's career, Goldwin Smith, the English historian and critic, said in recent years: "This great victory at Fort Donelson was the first light of hope in a darkness which seemed almost that of despair!"

But the new year opened more auspiciously. On January 10, Col. James A. Garfield gained a decided victory near Prestonsburg, Kentucky, and at Mill Springs in the same state the troops under Gen. George H. Thomas gained a signal victory on January 19, in which engagement the Confederate general, Zollicoffer, was killed. Early in February General Burnside effected the capture of forts and destruction of vessels of the Confederates at Roanoke Island, and the decisive success in the capture of Fort Henry on February 6 was followed by the surrender of Fort Donelson on the sixteenth to the Union forces. Those were all of the highest importance to the Union cause, and the hopes of its friends were raised from that of despair to confidence and an enthusiasm in its behalf. During the previous summer and fall the Confederates had laid out and established a line of operation and defense, extending from Columbus on the Mississippi through southwestern Kentucky and northern Tennessee to the mountains in the latter state, and had not only erected formidable works at Columbus, at Fort Henry on the Tennessee, and at Fort Donelson near Dover on the Cumberland River, but had, too, a considerable and well-organized military force stationed at such points, and other places extending from the great river to the mountains of East Tennessee, General Polk being in command at Columbus, General Zollicoffer then at Cumberland Gap,

with Gen. Albert Sydney Johnson in command of the department with headquarters at Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Navigable from its mouth at Paducah into Alabama, the Tennessee River was to be defended by Fort Henry, while Fort Donelson was to protect the Cumberland from Smithland on the Ohio to Nashville and beyond. The latter, the capital of the state, was a point of vast importance to the southern cause, situated as it was in a rich agricultural region, and with the fertile fields of Kentucky on the north. Both by rail and river it largely controlled the movements of the troops and supplies, and with a firm foothold in Tennessee, southern Kentucky and southern Missouri—could they hold the smaller rivers and established lines of defense—they would confine the battles of the west to their front, and be able, they hoped, to check the advance of the western armies of the Union, and as well hold the navigation of the Mississippi from Cairo to New Orleans. Both from the military and political view, in gaining the favor of the people of such sections there was much at stake, especially so as those of Kentucky were endeavoring, in a manner, to remain neutral, but all such hopes were blasted, as point after point was taken by the advancing Union armies.

On the Union side, early in September, General Grant had been placed in command of a district comprising territory in Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri, with headquarters at Cairo, which place with points in the states named had heretofore been occupied, and his first important move was to occupy Paducah and Smithland as points for future operations. General Halleck at St. Louis, who had succeeded General Fremont in November, was importuned by General Grant for authority to advance against the enemy on the Tennessee, desiring to strike near his center, but it was not until about February 1 when, perhaps influenced by the desire and order of President Lincoln for a

general advance by February 22, that tacit consent for such a campaign was gained, and Commodore Andrew Hull Foote, with his gunboat flotilla, directed to co-operate in the contemplated movement.

General Grant immediately commenced active preparations for the advance, troops were concentrated at Cairo and Paducah, and on February 3 the divisions of Generals John A. McClernand and Charles F. Smith, with a brigade commanded by Gen. Lew Wallace, were landed from transports a few miles below Fort Henry, to which point they had been convoyed by the gunboats. The creeks and streams in the vicinity were swollen by recent rains, which made it necessary that bridges be built for the wagon and artillery trains, and the roads were almost impassable, hence the progress of the land forces was slow, but the high stage of water in the river was favorable to the ironclads, and they advanced and attacked the fort at 11.45 A. M. of February 6. Firing from the fort promptly followed, and in a brief time the action was terrific! In this, their first trial, the ironclads easily won, and at 2 P. M. the Confederate flag was lowered, and surrender followed upon the arrival of General Grant soon after. Early in the day General Tighlman, in command of the fort, had sent the infantry, cavalry and light artillery garrison—all but the artillerists of the water batteries—to his outer works on the Donelson Road, and, owing to the inability of the Union land forces to arrive in time, the Confederate forces indicated—estimated at from 3,000 to 4,000 men—escaped and made their way to Fort Donelson, while General Tighlman, his personal staff and some ninety men surrendered. The heavy guns, much ammunition and considerable quantities of army stores were captured. The casualties to the enemy were slight, while the Union loss on the vessels was forty-one in killed and wounded.

THE MOVE UPON FORT DONELSON.

With this preliminary of the situation, we come to the immediate move upon Fort Donelson on February 12, 1862, when General Grant with about 15,000 men marched overland from Fort Henry upon that stronghold fourteen miles away on the Cumberland. Exceedingly broken by ravines, creeks and gullies, generally wooded with timber of medium growth and thick underbrush, the ground about the defenses was also quite hilly, and fronting the river on the east, the fort proper was well built upon a plateau of ground covering about one hundred acres, and at an average height of one hundred feet above the ordinary level of the water of the river. Their regular main fort was enclosed with effective earthworks with bastions and ditches, and on the wings, both north and south, field works consisting of intrenchments and rifle pits were thrown up, such works being crested with logs from under which the enemy fired, while back of the main fort on the land side, as well as in front of the field works, the trees had been felled and the underbrush slashed and cut, forming an effective and wide abatis.

A further formidable defense was two water batteries occupying the bluffs of the river on the north, the armament comprising one 10-inch columbiad, eleven 32-pounders, and a rifled piece carrying a 128-pound shot. These batteries were well constructed, had an elevation of thirty-two feet above the stage of the water at the time of the attack, and were served by experienced artillerymen.

In addition to infantry and cavalry the fort and outer works were well supplied with field guns and batteries of light artillery, and, as a whole, it was one of the most formidable positions of the enemy attacked during the war. General Grant well said: "Nature has done much to make a situation almost impregnable!"

The Confederate forces at Donelson were commanded by Gen. John B. Floyd, aided by Generals Gideon J. Pillow, and Simon B. Buckner, the cavalry troops being under Col. N. B. Forrest.

The Compte de Paris in his Memoirs of the Civil War states:

"The importance of Donelson after the fall of Fort Henry was equally appreciated by both the Federal and Confederate forces as that fort alone was able to stop the Federal forces on the Cumberland and protect the Capitol of Tennessee."

Again this observer says:

"The attack of General Grant upon an entrenched enemy was a bold movement. His army, hastily recruited, was illy supplied; many regiments were without necessary equipments for a winter campaign even in that latitude. In this condition the Union forces were about to attack an enemy equal in numbers, posted inside of works carefully constructed, and controlling the river which secured his communications and bases of supplies. But General Grant knew what he could expect from the hardy men of the West who composed his army."

Leaving Fort Henry, General McClernand's division posted on the Donelson Road first reached the scene of action, and took position on the right of the line of attack. Gen. Charles F. Smith's division followed and was assigned to the left, while Gen. Lew Wallace's brigade was left to guard the property captured at Fort Henry. Six regiments under Col. John M. Thayer, of Nebraska, arriving at Fort Henry that morning, were directed to return by river and report at Donelson upon the transports conveying them, and were accompanied by the ironclads on their way.

General McClernand's division, opposed by small parties of the enemy's cavalry only, approached and deployed to the right, and upon the arrival of General Smith's division later he drew his lines closer to the enemy's outer works, General Smith taking

position to the left without opposition. The battle commenced at daybreak the next morning of the thirteenth, when the enemy opened with sharp artillery fire on the right, and supported by infantry, advanced from his intrenchments, and engagements followed with varying results during the entire day. Driven back at points, the enemy, reinforced by light batteries and infantry, again sallied forth and the Union batteries falling short of ammunition were obliged to withdraw some distance, where a stand was effected. On the extreme right the Union regiments fought to points near the enemy's works, where they were held from further advance by the fallen timber and underbrush, and as night fell the Union troops maintained positions taken in the face of protected batteries and the sharpshooters of the enemy, after serious losses in killed and wounded.

During the day General Smith also extended his lines on the left to near the enemy's outer works on the hills in front, and in an engagement displacing an annoying battery of light artillery, the 25th Indiana, in a sharp fight, lost fourteen men killed and sixty-one wounded, and the 14th Iowa two killed and fourteen wounded. And so closed the second day at Donelson in a driving snowstorm, and the Union troops without tents or rations except as their haversacks supplied, in positions and surroundings hardly known, passed a gloomy night, their pickets, with those of the foe, shivering under the stress of the day and the hostile elements of the night, as they disputed the narrow space between the lines and parties from either side gathered their dead and carried away the wounded from the field of the day's struggles.

Friday the fourteenth opened cold but clear, and, severely tried as the troops were, they promptly rose to duty. On the right General McClelland strengthened his positions and on the left as well the day passed without incident, except exchange

of shots between the artillery and sharpshooters of the opponents. Under orders, Gen. Lew Wallace brought his brigade from Fort Henry, and with Colonel Thayer's brigade arriving by river a new division was formed, and under command of General Wallace it took position in the center, General Smith concentrating to the left. The 2nd Iowa Infantry, arriving on the fourteenth, was assigned to Colonel Lauman's brigade and placed on the extreme left of General Smith's line of investment.

The flotilla of gunboats arriving on the night of the thirteenth had taken position below the range of fire from the water batteries of the enemy and remained quiet until about 3 o'clock P. M. of the fourteenth, when Commodore Foote made an attack upon the latter, but after an engagement of an hour and a half, met with signal defeat, several of his disabled vessels drifting helpless down the swift current of the narrow river. Through inflicting considerable injury to the enemy's guns the able gunners of the water batteries defeated the ironclads which had rendered such effective service at Fort Henry a few days before. The loss on the attacking vessels was fifty-four men killed and wounded, Flag Officer Foote being himself severely injured.

General Grant's own comment on the situation the night of the fourteenth was in substance as follows.

That until the arrival of Wallace by land and Thayer's troops by the river on the fourteenth he had but 15,000 men, without intrenchments and with the enemy in well constructed defenses and an army of 21,000 men, and no conflict ensued other than that brought about by the national troops. On the afternoon of that day, ironclads which had alone caused the surrender of Fort Henry eight days before, were utterly defeated in their purpose after an hour and a half's engagement. Rain set in during the afternoon of the fourteenth and by evening was followed by snow, and a crust of sleety ice covered everything.

To quote General Grant again:

"The sun went down on the night of the fourteenth of February, 1862, leaving the army confronting Fort Donelson anything but comforted over the prospects."

Another writer said:

"The men lay in sleet and snow in the bitter cold, but fortitude and courage were never more bravely displayed. * * * Officers and men * * * stood to their arms, ready for the work of an eventful day!"

Saturday the fifteenth dawned cold and clear, and proved to be the decisive day of the battle which had been on since the twelfth. In the early morning, General Grant, after a consultation with Commodore Foote of the fleet on his flagship, as he had been wounded, had about concluded to enter into a siege and await reinforcements, but as he left the vessel of the flag officer he was met by an aid with information that the enemy coming in force from his lines had attacked McClelland's right and driven the Union troops back in retreat! This message was startling, and General Grant at once started for the scene of action, but owing to the bad roads he did not reach there—nearly five miles away—until about 1 o'clock P. M., and soon learned that McClelland's troops, running short of ammunition after severe fighting since early morning, were obliged to fall back until reinforced by a portion of General Wallace's division when the further advance of the Confederates was halted after heavy losses on both sides.

Very early in the day the enemy in large numbers had come from his defenses and made desperate attack at several points on the right, and soon a serious battle was in progress. Though several times repulsed, the Confederates rallied with increased forces of light artillery and infantry and bravely renewed their

efforts, and after the most gallant attack and defense until about 11 o'clock A. M., the Union troops covering a long line of investment, and impeded by the woods and thick underbrush, and also falling short of ammunition, were obliged to fall back until relieved by the fresh troops of General Wallace's division. Upon the call of General McClelland in the early forenoon, General Wallace had sent Colonel Cruft's brigade to his aid. Going to the extreme right, for a time it bore the brunt of attack from that direction, and later, accompanied by General Wallace in person, Colonel Thayer's brigade was also sent forward to confront the advancing enemy. With the aid of a section of a Chicago battery of light artillery under Lieutenant Wood, this brigade, too, rendered most efficient service, the advancing enemy was halted, and McClelland's troops in the meantime being resupplied with ammunition, their further progress was effectively stopped. The losses of the day had already, however, been very heavy, Oglesby's brigade of Illinois troops alone having lost over 800 in killed and wounded in the engagements before 11 o'clock of that morning, the brave troops again fighting as gallantly as on the thirteenth when they held the enemy to his lines. One of the officers, in his report of the early fighting of the day, said: "The wounded, the mangled, the dying and the dead formed a scene which baffled description, the battle raging while the surgeons were assuaging the wounds!"

But with the lines reformed, the enemy was again attacked and driven back, and discouraged, they ceased the struggle toward 1 o'clock P. M., and the successful Union troops were resting on their arms as the commander, General Grant, soon after rode up to where the two division chiefs were in consultation and from whom, in a brief time, he learned the conditions and at once grasped the situation.

It was for the Union army indeed a critical moment. Delay

meant that the Confederates would be reinforced from Nashville and Bowling Green not far away, the river to Nashville being unguarded; but just at this juncture, upon examining captured Confederates, it was found that, while fighting, the enemy were carrying haversacks filled with rations. Grant reasoned quickly and concluded the early morning movement was an effort to break through the lines, and escape with as many of the main force as might be possible; and as quickly deciding his course, at once directed Generals McClelland and Wallace to re-attack the enemy and regain the positions held in the morning. This was done and after a sharp conflict of two hours more the Confederates again fell back into their works and the roads to Nashville were once more in possession of the Union forces, and the troops rested upon such conquest.

General Grant, after his orders to Generals McClelland and Wallace, rode hastily to the left and directed General Smith to make an immediate attack upon the works of the enemy upon the hill in his front, and the order was promptly executed. General Smith, in his report of the engagement which followed, states:

“In directing the assault on the right the artillery was ordered to open fire heavily, and the brigade commanders, pressing forward with large numbers of skirmishers to make a dash at any available opening—while the 2nd Iowa Infantry, supported by the 25th and 52nd Indiana, was selected to lead the assault. The 2nd Iowa was ordered to rely on the bayonet and not to fire a shot until the enemy’s ranks were broken.”

As a private soldier in the 2nd Iowa and a participant in the charge which followed, the writer may be pardoned for any personality appearing in the description of the movement and decisive action which followed. Organized in May, 1861, the regiment had rendered considerable service, but had been in no engagement with the enemy under fire. Stationed at St. Louis,

Mo., where it had been ordered in November, 1861, to recruit its ranks—in the meanwhile guarding Confederate prisoners of war—on February 10, 1862, it was directed to join General Grant's army, and the cold, raw morning of the fourteenth found the command on the transport steamer *McGill* near the wooded bank of the Cumberland, a few miles below Fort Donelson. It was assigned to General Smith's Division, and after disembarking and a march of some four miles over the worst possible roads, reached the scene and was placed in Colonel Lauman's brigade on the extreme left of the Union line of investment. The bleak day was spent in vain endeavor to keep warm, and the worse night following was one of great hardship and exposure for the contending armies—friends and foes. Early sounds of cannon and musketry on the right the morning of the fifteenth, and increasing as the time passed, told the story of the battle raging there, but on the left the troops could only conjecture from vague reports what the results were as the hours wore away.

The men had been told to keep near the lines of their stacked guns ready for any emergency, and suddenly, about three o'clock, an officer of commanding appearance, accompanied by several aids, dashed up on horseback and, after addressing our colonel, the regiment quickly fell in, took arms and saluted the division commander, Gen. Charles F. Smith. In a few words he said he had been directed by General Grant to attack the enemy, and that he had selected the 2nd Iowa to lead the charge upon their works. To succeed, it must rely upon the bayonet and not attempt to fire a shot until inside the intrenchments! He is quoted as saying: "If you succeed in driving the enemy from his position it will be the key to the fort. Reserve your fire until you reach the works."

Telling Colonel Tuttle the signal to start would be three can-

non shots fired in quick succession, he rode away to arrange for support. A graduate from West Point in 1825, General Smith had long served, and for gallant conduct at Contreras and Cherusco in Mexico had been promoted colonel. The division did not then know, however, what a magnificent officer their leader was, but his soldierly figure and bearing as he rode his restive horse inspired the greatest admiration and confidence, and the 630 men, the rank and file of the regiment, stood awaiting the signal—and action, which meant sure and quick death to many in its ranks. Perhaps in the few moments all the emotions of the human heart were tried before the strain was broken as the sharp cannon shots rang out and General Smith again rode up, exclaiming: “2nd Iowa, you must take the fort; take the caps from your guns, fix bayonets, and I will lead you!”

The command, “Forward!” followed, and the left wing leading, marched in column from the thin line of woods which had hid the regiment from the enemy, and, moving across an open field, formed in line beyond with the right wing following in the same order; and with colors on the right, the regiment fronted the enemy and without a halt advanced steadily forward against the earthworks at the top of the hill, from which the firing had already commenced two hundred yards away! The left wing led, the right followed close up, with General Smith riding in the rear, and the supporting regiments following as directed.

Marching in the ranks of the left wing the writer prefers to let another tell the story of the charge of the 2nd Iowa Infantry up the hill at Donelson on that Saturday afternoon of February 15, 1862, and quotes the account of the correspondent of the *New York World*, who was present and wrote his paper as follows:

“THE LAST DECISIVE CHARGE.

“On the right lay an open space up which climbed the brigade of Lauman. The 2d Iowa led the charge followed by the

rest in their order. Onward they speed heedless of the bullets and balls of the enemy above; the hill was so steep, the timber cleared, that the rebels had left a gap in their line of rifle pits on this crest of the hill. Right up they went climbing on all fours, their line of dark blue clothing advancing regularly forward to the white line of smoke from the top of the works fronting the line of our troops. They reach the top! Numbers fall! The suspense is breathless! See, they climb over the works—they fall—they are lost! Another group, and still another, and another, close up the gap. All is covered with smoke. The lodgement is made—the troops swarm up the hillside, their bright bayonets glittering in the sun; the fire slackens! Captain Stone's battery of rifled 10-pounders close behind the brigade is tugging up the hill, the horses plunging, the riders whipping; upward they go where never a vehicle went before; up the precipitous and clogged sides of the hill. No sooner on the crest than the guns are unlimbered, the men at their posts; percussion shells and canister are shot spitefully from the Parrott guns at the flying enemy. The day is gained—the position is taken—the troops surround the guns, the 34-pounder which has caused so much havoc is silenced, and the rebels fly to their main fort in alarm. The day is gained—the foe is running—cheers upon cheers rend the air, but in a few moments all is hushed!"

The charge was a success and the works were won, but as the pall of smoke rose from the scene, two hundred dead and wounded of the 2nd Iowa alone—among whom your writer lay in the tangled path below—told the cost of its victory! General Smith in his report said of the 2nd Iowa: "The movement of this regiment was a very handsome exhibition of soldierly conduct," and General Grant added, saying: "The charge on the left under General Smith was most brilliantly executed and gave to our arms full assurance of victory." The regiment was ably supported by the brigade, which lost 357, in killed and wounded, the 2nd Iowa having 54 killed and died of wounds, and 143 additional wounded in the assault. In full possession of the field

works contended for, as night came on the troops rested on their arms, the dead were buried, the wounded carried away and heavy guns mounted in the captured works in anticipation of early re-attack from the enemy, as presaged by the bugle calls and sounds of moving artillery from their camps nearby. But no guns sounded as the morning broke, and instead of the thunder of the artillery, the early sun-rays streaming out over the hills revealed the white flags of surrender flying from the outer bastions of the main fort of the enemy, and a little later Captain Mills, of the 2nd Iowa, advanced with a party to meet an approaching flag of truce, and a few hours later General Buckner, upon whom the disagreeable duty devolved by the escape of Generals Floyd and Pillow during the night, completely surrendered upon the peremptory demand of General Grant, as follows, and the siege of Fort Donelson was ended.

"HEADQUARTERS IN THE FIELD,
NEAR DONELSON,
February 16, 1862.

"GENERAL S. B. BUCKNER,
Confederate Armies.

"SIR: Yours of this date proposing armistice and appointment of commissioners to settle terms of capitulation is just received. No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works.

"I am, sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
(Signed) U. S. GRANT,
Brig. General Com'd'g."

While Fort Donelson was being besieged, President Lincoln telegraphed General Halleck at St. Louis, saying:

"Our success or failure at Fort Donelson is vastly important, and I beg you to put your soul in the effort."

The same day General Halleck telegraphed McClellan:

"Fort Donelson is the turning point of the war, and we must take it at whatever sacrifice!"

and on that same day, February 16, 1862, Grant's answer was:

"We have taken Fort Donelson and from 12,000 to 15,000 prisoners of war!"

When the Union army marched in to take possession, the 2d Iowa, with its band leading, headed the column, and General Halleck telegraphed the Adjutant-General of Iowa:

"The 2d Iowa proved themselves the bravest of the brave; they had the honor of leading the column which entered Fort Donelson."

One of the survivors of the assault wrote me recently as follows:

"This entry into the captured works was made while you were lying on the crest of the captured hill—or in the field hospital. What a pity that you could not be with us that Sunday morning, February 16, 1862, when we at the head of the troops entered Fort Donelson, uncontrolled tears streaming over our cheeks, tears of exultation mixed with sorrow, brought forth by the hearty cheers of the lined-up conquered foe, who had fought us so stubbornly the day previous. This day stands forth as the proudest day of my life, the 2d Iowa having been designated by General Grant to take the lead into the now-surrendered fort."

All the troops of the Union army fought bravely. Few had previously been under fire, but their conduct in all the engagements of the battle, on the right, left and center was magnificent, and General Grant accorded full credit for their heroic assaults upon the enemy whenever ordered into battle. It was about the first engagement of the war in which attacking troops

assaulted the enemy in his own intrenchments, and the brave and intrepid Illinois and other troops who so often and gallantly charged upon and drove back the columns of the enemy on the right are entitled to special mention and commendation for heroic effort. Three-fourths of the total Union loss was sustained by Illinois organizations which participated in the battle. Troops from Iowa, Indiana, Missouri, Kentucky, Ohio and Nebraska were also active in the engagement, as well as several companies of regular cavalry.

The total losses on the Union side, as stated in the reports made at the time, were:

Officers killed.....	22
Enlisted men killed.....	478
Officers wounded.....	87
Enlisted men wounded.....	2,021
Missing (captured).....	224
	<hr/>
	2,832
To which should be added 10 killed and 46 wounded on the ironclads.....	56
	<hr/>
Making the total loss.....	2,888

The capitulation delivered into the hands of General Grant, as shown by official reports, 14,623 prisoners of war, 65 cannon, 17,000 muskets, that is to say, an army and all its equipments, together with a large quantity of army stores and provisions.

On the Confederate side, no battle of the Civil War subjected the commanding officers to more severe criticism from the leaders at Richmond and the public of the South. Generals Floyd and Pillow were at once relieved of command, and public opinion censured Gen. Albert Sydney Johnston as well for the loss of the

fort, its defenders and stores, and for the hasty evacuation of Nashville, and the further loss of the large quantities of supplies concentrated there. General Pillow was severely criticised later for not following up his success in driving the Federal forces back, and failure to overwhelm the separated Union divisions, or at least to escape with his troops to Nashville, but his explanation was that General Floyd, his superior, had ordered him to fall back into the intrenchments.

Long and voluminous correspondence ensued in which there was wide variance in acceptance of blame or for responsibility, but the conclusion reached and announced at Richmond was: "It is impossible to acquit Brigadier-General Pillow of grave errors of judgment in the military operations which resulted in the surrender of the army."

A careful student of military movements would probably attribute the Confederate defeat to a lack of concentrated effort at any point or period of the battle. On the twelfth when the two divisions of General Grant's little army alone approached Donelson, marching in columns by diverging roads, their arrival separated by hours of time with the gunboat fleet still on the Tennessee—it is certain the cavalry forces of the enemy were superior in number, and his light artillery and infantry supported by the strength of his lines at least equal, if not superior, yet the Union troops were scarcely molested in the investment of the long line of his defenses. The early attacks of the enemy on the thirteenth were not concerted and the efforts of artillery and infantry supports were ineffectual in displacing the Union troops from positions taken. While on the fifteenth their early morning efforts met with greater success at the outset, their intention to cut their way out and escape with the greater part of their forces was frustrated, as their own leader claimed, for lack of support at the critical moment of the attempted move-

ment, and again they were driven back to their sheltering breast-works after most desperate effort and fighting of those engaged.

It must be assumed, however, that in any event the positions taken by the Confederates on the lower waters of the Tennessee and the Cumberland would become untenable in time, especially so as the State of Kentucky had refused to join the coalition of the seceding states, and its people had failed to afford the aid expected, but, had they saved Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, or even the forces and the supplies there and at Nashville, the conflict at Shiloh might possibly have resulted differently, and perhaps have enabled General Beauregard to have kept his boast "that he would water his horse in the Tennessee at Pittsburgh Landing on Sunday night!"

This comment is in no sense meant as a reflection upon the bravery of the foe at Donelson. Fighting as they did from the trenches, the water batteries, or in the open field, they too had the bitter hostile elements of the wintry storms as well as brave men to contend with, and exposed as they were for four or five days and nights, without shelter, covering or sleep, with the utmost courage they endured until duty and honor required no more of useless sacrifice.

A Confederate leader said:

"We left upon the field nearly all his wounded because we could not move them, his dead because we could not bury them; such conflict and carnage has perhaps never before occurred on this continent."

General Floyd, in his report of the surrender, said:

"Thus ended the conflict maintained four days and nights with great fierceness and obstinacy. Nothing could exceed the courage which characterized the troops throughout the terrible struggle,"

and such encomium should apply equally to the opposing forces in the battle.

Confederate leaders and writers have always contended that their forces at Fort Donelson were greatly over-estimated, and the Union troops under-estimated. General Grant in his *Memoirs* says:

"It is probable the Confederate force at Donelson on the fifteenth day of February, 1862, was 21,000 in round numbers. On the day that Donelson fell I had but 27,000 men to confront the Confederate lines and guard the road four or five miles to the left, over which all our supplies had to be hauled by wagons. During the sixteenth, after the surrender, additional reinforcements arrived."

He quotes that General Buckner told him the force surrendered was not less than 12,000 nor more than 15,000. In his report of the surrender General Buckner states 3,000 men escaped with Floyd. On the Confederate side the largest force admitted was 17,000 by Col. Preston Johnson, C. S. A. It is elsewhere stated that from 2,500 to 3,000 escaped with Generals Floyd and Pillow on the transports to Nashville and across the river after the council of war had determined to surrender. Colonel Forrest reports that above 500 of his own cavalry and two hundred mounted men of other commands rode through the slough and escaped with him on horseback. Several Confederate writers agree that after it was known the surrender was to take place many escaped across the river. An eminent Kentuckian (N. S. Shaffer) wrote:

"It was determined to surrender after a portion of the army had been passed over the river to the uninvested side of the fortress, and another part had escaped up the river on the steamers."

Fox, in his work on losses in the Civil War, states the losses of the Confederates at Donelson as follows: Killed 466, wounded 1,534, captured 13,829.

General Grant comments on the matter further, saying that at Cairo rations were issued for 14,623 Fort Donelson prisoners as they passed that point. Generals Floyd and Pillow were non-committal but admitted over 2,000 killed and wounded, but Pillow qualified this by saying that 1,534 wounded had been sent away before the surrender and 400 subsequently to Paducah. The killed must surely have numbered 500. The estimates of General Grant were verified by him in fixing the force of the enemy at about 21,000 in round numbers on February fifteenth. Whatever the forces the strong defenses of the Confederates made the attacking and defending armies equal. Under the rule of war, intrenched as they were, they should have beaten back three or four times as many of an attacking force.

In his report to the authorities at Richmond explaining the defeat, Gen. A. S. Johnston wrote: "I determined to fight for Nashville at Donelson, and gave the best of my army to do it."

A Southern historian of the Civil War has said of the loss of Fort Donelson to the Confederates:

"The chance of ultimate Confederate success in Kentucky depended on the issue of this defense more than it ever depended on any other battle in the Mississippi Valley. It was for the Southern cause the most serious action of the war. If there ever was a position in which a desperate defense was called for, it was at Fort Donelson."

To the Confederate leaders at Richmond the defeat at Donelson was indeed a disaster. Their hopes of holding Tennessee and gaining Kentucky into the Southern coalition were gone. An army of men and equipments, heavy artillery guns, light bat-

teries and considerable cavalry was lost, together with large quantities of ammunition and military stores.

Explaining the transfer of authority at the critical moment by Floyd to Pillow, and by the latter to Buckner, Colonel Johnston, C. S. A., General Buckner's aid-de-camp, relates:

"General Floyd thought that, owing to his having been Secretary of War (in Buchanan's Administration from 1857 to 1861), the Federal Government would be particularly anxious to capture him, and for him to surrender would endanger his life.

"Floyd said, 'General Pillow, I turn this command over to you.'

"Pillow said, 'Why, they would rather have me than Jeff Davis. I cannot surrender; General Buckner, I turn the command over to you!'

"Buckner's reply was: 'Gentlemen, you must decide for yourselves; as for me, I will share the fate of my troops.'"

Dr. John A. Wyeth, a Confederate soldier who surrendered at Donelson, in his *Life of General N. B. Forrest*, the Confederate cavalry leader, says:

"The struggle at Donelson was the first decisive battle of the Civil War. The Confederate historian will yet decide that in shaping events which, step by step brought the downfall of the Southern coalition, Fort Donelson stands pre-eminent. It was a blow which staggered the Confederacy, and from which it is safe to say it never wholly recovered."

Congratulating the troops taking part, General Grant said, on February 18, 1862:

"The victory achieved at Fort Donelson is not only great in breaking down rebellion, but has secured the greatest number of prisoners of war ever taken in one field on this continent. Fort Donelson will hereafter be marked in capital letters on the maps of our United Country."

The capture of Forts Henry and Donelson was acclaimed as most effective victories by the loyal people of the North, and the successes stimulated the patriotic impulse and relieved the feeling of doubt and uncertainty which had so generally existed. To the armies of the Union in the field it gave confidence and assurance of good leadership, and its benefits to the new soldiery in this respect could not be overestimated. The enemy hastily evacuated Bowling Green and Nashville, at the latter place abandoning great quantities of stores, and a vast territory in its retreat to the upper waters of the Tennessee where, making a stand at Shiloh, they were again defeated in April following.

Of the heroic leaders of the Union forces at Donelson it is of record that many won high rank and added honors during the war and after. Here bravely and well fought McClelland of Illinois; Lew Wallace of Indiana, distinguished as soldier, diplomat and author; the gallant McPherson killed at Atlanta in 1864; Logan, soldier and statesman; W. H. L. Wallace, also of Illinois, killed at Shiloh, and many others.

Charles Ferguson Smith, the division commander, was made a major-general, but had fought his last battle at Donelson. Following the foe in retreat, he died at Savannah on the Tennessee in April. He had served as an officer in the United States Army for thirty-seven years, and, as brave as Phil Kearny, killed at Chantilly, and with the energy of Phil Sheridan, was a glorious type of the American soldier.

The hero of the armies and of the people of the north after his effective victory, Ulysses S. Grant became the commander-in-chief and the victorious general of the Civil War. His exhortation for peace at its close won the plaudits of the nation, and his magnanimity the praise of a defeated foe. His determination of will and constancy proved him the ideal military leader in a great conflict, and as soldier, executive and citizen he served his

country well, and was honored by its people and the world in his passing.

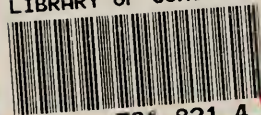
No monument of state marks the field, but the men—the rank and the file—who fought, who fell, at Donelson, need not

“The storied urn, or chiseled marble”

in remembrance. While time remains the story of their deeds will be told by the children of men.



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